

My colleagues here may never have heard of Central Hudson, but the people of the Hudson Valley know them all too well.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today for the farmer in Ulster Park, New York, who received such a massive utility bill, \$16,585, 17 times her normal bill, that she actually contemplated suicide. She described the debt, which put her at risk of losing her family farm, as a guillotine hanging over her head.

I rise for the single mother in Kingston who told me she is afraid to cook for her four kids because turning on the stove means facing a gigantic gas bill.

For the mayor of our city of Newburgh, who received a bill of \$708,000 for a single month of electricity at his three-bedroom family home; for senior citizens on a fixed income who had their entire checking accounts wiped out by an autopay withdrawal.

I could tell hundreds more of these stories and still not scratch the surface of this incredible corporate ineptitude.

Mr. Speaker, we rely on our public utilities for a necessary service. They exist for the public good. They are built on a foundation of public trust.

Central Hudson, and its CEO, Mr. Charles Freni, have irrevocably broken this trust. Since my calls for an investigation into Central Hudson's disastrous billing practices almost a year ago, we have received more than 11,000 formal complaints. A New York State Department of Public Service report revealed Central Hudson's billing system was riddled with hundreds of programming errors, leading to nearly 5,000 customers not receiving their bills, 8,000 customers overcharged, and more than 30,000 customers whose autopay was billed incorrectly, costing them over \$16 million.

I want to be clear. I do not fault the hardworking employees of Central Hudson. They begged for additional training. They suggested improvements to this system. They worked hours and hours of overtime. They wanted to do the right thing for the people of the Hudson Valley, but Central Hudson and its CEO clearly did not.

Just 2 weeks ago in response to this devastating Public Service Commission report documenting their systemic failures, Central Hudson doubled-down on their deflection, their denial, and their deception. Rather than taking ownership of their failures, they claimed that no customers were overcharged and that nobody lost any money.

Give me a break.

Central Hudson's leadership deliberately chose to sweep these problems under the rug. Why?

Because now owned by a multibillion-dollar and multinational corporation, they chose to put profits over people. At the same time as customers'—my constituents'—bills were skyrocketing and bank accounts were literally being emptied out, their reve-

nues were up over 30 percent and their profits—surprise, surprise—they are up, too.

Central Hudson has had opportunity after opportunity to own their mistakes and take accountability, but time and again they have failed to do so.

Mr. Speaker, there is simply no excuse for this. At a time when our families are facing tremendous economic pressure, the last thing they need to worry about is their bank accounts being emptied out just because they tried to power their home.

Because of these failures and because of Central Hudson's continued unwillingness to take accountability, today I am calling on Central Hudson's CEO, Mr. Charles Freni, to do the right thing for our community and to resign.

We need a new leader who will come in, improve service, finally fix these systemic problems, and start the critical work to rebuild trust with our community. That is what the people of the Hudson Valley deserve.

DOCTORS KNOW BEST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. MCCORMICK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Mr. Speaker, I want to address the Freedom for Healthcare Workers Act that has been submitted and we will soon vote on.

As an ER physician who has treated thousands of patients, who has been exposed to COVID thousands of times, and watched nurses and midlevels and healthcare workers of all kinds complain about the government's involvement in healthcare, I wanted to address this topic.

I believe I am the only Congressman who has actually been an ER doctor in the pandemic. My last shift was December 28. I intubated a patient and saw three critical patients. Several of them had COVID. Nobody was admitted for COVID, though.

Back to the point, though. During this pandemic we started off with no vaccination. Meanwhile, most of us were exposed regardless of what PPE we had, and it was limited at times to people who had fevers, who had symptoms even before we knew what COVID was. A lot of us got sick and developed immunity naturally.

Then the government stepped in. Although well-meaning, a lot of times government officials think they have the answer to everything, including things they really don't know about. What they will do is cherry-pick the experts that agree with them to say this is what experts believe, and that is why all healthcare professionals should believe this also. That is not how we make progress in medicine. As a matter of fact, it stifles innovation and progress.

At one time we had a President, President Garfield, who was shot, and it was poor practice in medicine where

doctors probed his wound and made him septic that caused him to die. There was a dissenting opinion by Dr. Lister—you may have heard of Listerine—who believed in antiseptic but he was scoffed at and belittled because he was the outlying person. Imagine where we would be if government stepped in and said: Our experts said you don't need to wash your hands before you probe wounds. We would still be in the Dark Ages of medicine.

I beg the government to stay out of the way of healthcare progress. To stay out of the debate of healthcare professionals because, quite frankly, very few people in Congress understand medicine the way healthcare professionals do. They haven't been to medical school, and even those who have, they haven't been in medicine for a long time. Quite frankly, the Doctors Caucus is seldom relied on for healthcare policy, which is a shame.

If you haven't been to medical school, if you haven't taken your boards, if you haven't been through a residency, if you haven't seen tens of thousands of patients, you shouldn't be telling doctors who have a dissenting opinion what to do.

There is no standard of care based on government. It is based on physicians having a good decision, trying different things, and finding out what works. That is how medicine has progressed in America; far beyond any limitations that we have in foreign countries.

We are the leaders of innovation and healthcare. We should consider our healthcare professionals when we make decisions and not consider government first when it comes to standard of care.

If you want to require healthcare professionals to have a vaccination, why do you think the government understands that requirement better than the very healthcare professional who not only treats this but was exposed to it, who has natural immunities, and who understands the side effects; not only of the disease but of the vaccination.

Once again, I submit to you that it is time to let healthcare professionals make their own decisions, especially when it comes to their own lives. They are the ones that put their lives on the line during the pandemic. They are the ones that treated the sick patients. They are the ones that know best whether a vaccination will benefit them or harm them, not a government.

I must also remind you that our Constitution is based on individual rights, not on a collective governance by politicians telling people what to do in things they don't know about.

Mr. Speaker, I hope we support the Freedom for Healthcare Workers Act.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENTS OF ANGELO K. TSAKOPOULOS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. BERA) for 5 minutes.

Ms. BERA. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the lifetime achievements of Angelo K. Tsakopoulos.

Mr. Tsakopoulos' story is a story of the American Dream. Angelo immigrated to the United States from Greece at the age of 15. He worked hard. He didn't have a whole lot but went into the real estate business to help pay for his education at California State University, Sacramento. He built a real estate company.

Angelo helped shape Sacramento over his life. The Sacramento Bee has identified Mr. Tsakopoulos potentially as the most influential Sacramentan since John Sutter. His contributions, not just to our community but to philanthropy, to education, and to the arts are outstanding.

Mr. Tsakopoulos also never forgot his roots in Greece. This Monday he will receive lifetime recognition for his service to Hellenism. He established multiple foundations and organizations to celebrate the values and the culture of his homeland.

He also, through his family, continues to do public service through his daughter Eleni who is our Lieutenant Governor in California. On Monday, February 6, all of us in Sacramento, the United States, and all Greek Americans recognize the contributions of Angelo Tsakopoulos and his family; contributions to preserving Greek culture.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. BERA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the first day of Black History Month to recognize the importance of studying African-American history and Black history in the United States.

It is incredibly important for us to recognize Black history and teach it not only to our young students from elementary school to middle school to high school, but to all Americans. We have to understand the good and the bad. We have to understand the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration.

We need to understand—as I stand here on the floor of the House of Representatives in the United States Capitol, a beacon of democracy and freedom—that this is a building that was built by enslaved people. It is important for us to understand that because we need to recognize that and get better at teaching that to future generations of Americans.

We also need to recognize the accomplishments of a few individuals: the moral character of our former colleague, John Lewis, who really was the moral backbone of this institution; the first President that I served under, Barack Obama, the accomplishments, not just as President but as a great human being, father, and husband; my close friend, the first female Vice President, the first African-American Vice President, the first Asian-American Vice President, Vice President KAMALA HARRIS who is a role model for my daughter and future women across the spectrum in the United States; and

our good friend, the minority leader of the Democratic Party, HAKEEM JEFFRIES, someone who we are all proud of.

Let's understand African-American history. Let's teach it. Let's not try to erase the parts that we don't want to teach. If we don't teach Black history, we will be condemned to repeat some of those mistakes. We need to learn from the past, and we need to get better. Let's teach it to all of our students.

HONORING KEN COOLEY

Mr. BERA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Assemblyman Ken Cooley for his decades of service to Sacramento County and the State of California.

Ken served in the California State Assembly for 10 years representing the Eighth Assembly District, which covered the eastern half of Sacramento County.

Assemblyman Cooley started his public service career in Sacramento as the chief of staff to the State assemblyman, and later as chief counsel to the Assembly Finance and Insurance Committee.

He was elected to the Rancho Cordova's first city council in 2002 and twice served as mayor to Rancho Cordova. Ken was a constant presence and continues to be a constant presence throughout our community.

I have had the privilege to go to many events with Ken, and he is a close friend. He is an Eagle Scout, as well, and his commitment to Scouting helped recognize youth achievement through the Boy Scouts of America.

The City of Rancho Cordova and all of us in Sacramento County are better off thanks to his hard work and determination, and I wish him all the best in the next chapter of his life.

AMERICANS HAVE THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. MILLER) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MILLER of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, Americans have a fundamental right to keep and bear arms that shall not be infringed.

The unelected bureaucrats at the ATF do not have the constitutional authority to ban guns and violate the Second Amendment rights of American citizens.

I am proud to join my colleagues to fight to block Joe Biden's pistol brace gun ban and also to fight to defund the ATF.

□ 1030

In Illinois, Governor Pritzker signed an unconstitutional gun ban that violates the Second Amendment rights of my constituents. Joe Biden and J.B. Pritzker's policies released dangerous criminals and defund the police, and then they want to take our Second Amendment right to defend ourselves.

I am a proud member of the House Freedom Caucus and the House Second

Amendment Caucus. We are united in our opposition to these unconstitutional attacks on the rights of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I will always stand for our constitutional rights and protect our Second Amendment rights in Congress.

PROTECTING SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, Social Security coverage is an earned benefit. In January, Social Security beneficiaries began to see an 8.7 percent cost-of-living increase, the largest since 1981. This COLA covers retirees as well as workers who become disabled and surviving children under age 18 whose working parents died.

For nearly a century, America has honored the sacred insurance promise intergenerationally. Those who work throughout their lives will benefit from the fruits of their labor.

Yes, this historic cost-of-living adjustment will help Americans manage their cost of living to pay bills and put food on the table. In addition, millions of Medicare users will now only pay \$35 per month for insulin. This cost savings will benefit hundreds of thousands of Ohioans.

The Social Security COLA along with affordable insulin are being championed by congressional Democrats. We know the foundation of financial stability for over 66 million retired Americans is their earned social insurance benefits. Respecting their lives and their work, Democrats will always honor Social Security and vote to protect it and to strengthen Medicare.

FUND NEW GREAT LAKES AUTHORITY

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to also call upon President Biden to fund the new Great Lakes Authority in the administration's fiscal year 2024 budget request.

With support from our Great Lakes colleagues, the Great Lakes Authority was authorized in the fiscal year 2023 omnibus appropriations bill and signed into law on January 2, 2023.

Across America, regional development instrumentalities like this have existed for decades. Until now, the Great Lakes region was the one major region left out of our Nation's toolkit for regional cooperation, reinvestment, and revitalization.

Launched initially with Federal resources to drive economic and environmental recovery, this authority now exists and aims to become self-sufficient sooner rather than later. This new year brings new opportunities for public-private partnerships across our Great Lakes region for investment and revitalization.

The Great Lakes Authority will harness the region's strengths, which include stewardship of the largest body of freshwater on the continent and on